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Agenda item 149 (b)

**United Nations Decade of International Law: Progress in the action
dedicated to the 1999 centennial of the first International Peace
Conference and to the closing of the United Nations Decade of
International Law**

**Letter dated 10 November 1998 from the Permanent Representatives of
the Netherlands and the Russian Federation to the United Nations
addressed to the Secretary-General**

Please find enclosed a progress report on the action dedicated to the 1999 centennial of the first International Peace Conference, as drawn up pursuant to General Assembly resolution 51/159 of 16 December 1996 by the Russian Federation and the Netherlands (see annex).

It is requested that the progress report be distributed as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 149 (b).

(Signed) Jaap Ramaker
Permanent Representative

(Signed) Sergey V. Lavrov
Permanent Representative



Annex

Progress report on the action dedicated to the 1999 centennial of the first International Peace Conference and to the closing of the United Nations Decade of International Law

Report submitted by the delegations of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Russian Federation

1. Pursuant to paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution 52/154 of 15 December 1997,^a the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Russian Federation herewith present the progress report on the activities pertaining to the 1999 centennial of the first International Peace Conference to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session for consideration under agenda item 149 (b).

I. Preliminary reports on the themes of the first International Peace Conference

2. Preliminary reports on disarmament questions, international humanitarian law and the peaceful settlement of disputes have been prepared by the following rapporteurs: Mr. Hans Blix, Mr. Christopher Greenwood, Mr. Francisco Orrego Vicuña and Mr. Christopher Pinto, who are highly regarded authorities in their respective fields of expertise. As of summer 1998, these reports were made available for downloading on the Internet.^b The reports can be made available in hard copy in limited numbers to delegations, upon request. The following two experts, originally invited to serve as rapporteurs, have not been able to finalize their tasks: Mr. Jayantha Dhanapala and Mr. Georges Abi-Saab. The co-hosts hope that these experts will nevertheless extend their wisdom and expertise to the discussions of the reports in the course of the ongoing debate on the centennial themes. Their contributions will significantly benefit the discussions.

II. Comments on the preliminary reports

3. The preliminary reports have been, are being and will be discussed at various regional meetings, including:

- Inter-American Commission of Jurists of the Organization of American States (OAS);
- Ad Hoc Committee of Legal Advisers on Public International Law of the Council of Europe;
- Asian-African Legal Consultative Committee (AALCC);
- International Law Commission (ILC);
- International Bureau of the Permanent Court of Arbitration.

4. Judge Gilbert Guillaume of the International Court of Justice, in his personal capacity, also commented on the preliminary report on the peaceful settlement of disputes. The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway, Mr. Knut Vollebæk, contributed his Fridtjof Nansen Memorial lecture,^c entitled "Small arms: great challenges", to the discussions on the themes of disarmament questions and humanitarian law. Furthermore, special arrangements have

been made with organizers of AALCC (early February 1999, New Delhi) and the Asia-Pacific Region Commemorative Conference of the 1899 Hague Peace Conference (University of Melbourne, Australia, 18–20 February 1999) on the inclusion of the contributions to these events in the discussions on the centennial themes.

5. These comments on the preliminary reports will also be available for downloading from the centennial Web site.

6. Other relevant international forums, at either the regional or the universal level, interested organizations, as well as individuals from all over the world have also been invited to submit their comments to the preliminary report. These comments should be submitted to the Executive Secretariat of the 1999 centennial by e-mail,^d or any other electronic means^e as soon as possible, in order to be considered by other forums. In order to be considered by the rapporteurs, comments should be submitted before the end of 1998, at the latest.

7. Preliminary reports will be updated by the rapporteurs in the light of comments received. The updated reports will be available for consideration by participants to the centennial events at The Hague and St. Petersburg.

III. Follow-up to the centennial reports and the outcome of The Hague and St. Petersburg: closing of the United Nations Decade of International Law

8. The conclusions of the discussions on the three centennial themes, as discussed preliminarily and at The Hague and St. Petersburg events, together with the final reports on the conclusions of those events, will be submitted to the United Nations for consideration by the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session at the closing of the United Nations Decade of International Law. They might indicate possible ways ahead on particular aspects of the three centennial themes. These documents will also be forwarded to the twenty-seventh International Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference. Furthermore, the conclusions and final reports will be available for consideration by other interested forums.

9. At the closing of the United Nations Decade of International Law the conclusions and final reports will be forwarded for consideration in an appropriate manner at the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly.

IV. Friends of 1999

10. Meetings of the "Friends of 1999"^f were held at The Hague in 1997, and in Moscow in April 1998. On 29 October 1998, a final meeting of the Friends before the events took place in New York.

11. Representatives of some 20 States from all regions of the world, the International Court of Justice, the Permanent Court of Arbitration, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the coalition of non-governmental organizations known as the Hague Appeal for Peace were invited for further consultations regarding the preliminary reports of the rapporteurs for the centennial of the First International Peace Conference. During the discussions, meaningful progress was achieved on the further elaboration of the programme of action for the centennial of the first International Peace Conference and on coordination between the various parties to that process.

V. Emblem of the centennial of the first International Peace Conference

12. As can be seen on the documents downloaded from the Web site an ostrich feather, the ancient hieroglyph *ma-at*, has been chosen as the emblem of the centennial of the first International Peace Conference. As probably one of the oldest written signs for "law" known to mankind, this hieroglyph, first of all, symbolizes a long and established global legal tradition, marked especially by the 1899 first International Peace Conference and its centennial celebrations in 1999. The *ma-at* hieroglyph represented justice, truth and (eternal, cosmic) harmony, and as such also symbolizes the aims of the United Nations Decade of International Law, and of the centennial of the first International Peace Conference in particular.

VI. Agenda

13. The preliminary agenda for the celebration of the centennial of the first International Peace Conference will be made available concomitantly with the issuance of the draft resolution.^g

14. On 17 May 1999, the Permanent Court of Arbitration will hold a commemorative session of its members at the Peace Palace in The Hague. On 18 and 19 May 1999, the official commemoration of the centennial of the first International Peace Conference will be opened, and the legislative and normative aspects of the three themes of the Centennial will be considered at the expert level at the Peace Palace in The Hague.

15. From 22 to 25 June 1999, the implementation aspects of the themes of the centennial will be considered at the expert level in St. Petersburg.

16. The conclusions of discussions at The Hague and St. Petersburg will, as has been stated above, be submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session for consideration at the closing of the United Nations Decade of International Law.

VII. Attendance and invitations

17. The co-hosts of the 1999 centennial celebrations will invite legal advisers from States to participate in the official centennial commemorative events at The Hague, the Netherlands, and St. Petersburg, Russian Federation. High-level officials of the United Nations Secretariat, of the (organs of) international organizations and of other international organizations will also be invited to either or both of the centennial events, as well as representatives of non-governmental organizations, such as those operating within the framework of the Hague Appeal for Peace.^h The host countries will, of course, be represented at the highest level.

Notes

^a See also the programme of action for the celebration of the centennial of the first International Peace Conference (A/C.6/52/3).

^b www.minbuza.nl/english/conferences/c_peace1.html

^c Presented at the Peace Palace, The Hague, 12 October 1998.

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- ^d 1999@dvb.minbuza.nl. The Web site contains a mail-back facility, automatically sending the comments to the correct e-mail address.
- ^e Although hard copy versions are welcome as well, electronic submission will ensure swift transmission to other interested forums.
- ^f Australia, Austria, Brazil, Chile, Cyprus, Denmark, Egypt, France, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, Nicaragua, Poland, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Senegal, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Permanent Court of Arbitration, International Court of Justice, International Committee of the Red Cross, Carnegie Foundation, Hague Appeal for Peace.
- ^g In the week of 10–15 May 1999 the NGO coalition Hague Appeal for Peace will organize civil society activities in connection with the centennial of the first International Peace Conference at The Hague for participants from all over the world. The Hague Appeal for Peace agenda will be available in the Conference Room.
- ^h At The Hague: five representatives for each of the centennial themes, as observers.
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